

Postscript:

After the above paper had been typeset, Byrd (*in Sprunt et al.* 1978. Nat. Audubon Soc. N.Y.) reported a juvenile Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, colour ringed in Virginia and recovered at sea in the Gulf of Mexico c. 100 km south of the coast of Louisiana in the direction of Yucatan. This observation and my own at Alacran appear to show that at least some Cattle Egrets (a species absent from much of the United States during winter) make direct trans-Gulf flights to Mexico, this being one of 3 possible routes discussed by Byrd.

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A new race of *Pitta oatesi* from Peninsular Malaysia by Ben King

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In April 1977, I spent six days on Fraser's Hill in the mountains of western Pahang trying to find a pitta that had been reported intermittently over a period of 29 years, but had never been identified.

The first records of a pitta, apparently resident in the Malaysian mountains, are those of Bromley (1952) who saw and heard birds which he thought were Giant Pittas *Pitta caerulea* on Fraser's Hill in August 1948, and heard similar calls at Maxwell's Hill, Perak state, on 29 April 1950. A further sighting, also attributed to *caerulea*, was reported from Fraser's Hill by Allen (1959). At the same locality on 31 May 1969, Graham Madge, David Wells and Ken Scriven tape-recorded calls similar to that described by Bromley. No bird was seen but on the following day near the same spot, Wells saw a brown pitta with green back and shining blue rump. Subsequently Madge saw a similar bird.

I started my search in late afternoon on 3 April by playing a copy of the tape made in 1969 by Ken Scriven. One bird replied. Next morning I walked a trail for about one km and got responses to the tape from 3 different birds. I got only brief shadowy glimpses of 2 birds and saw even less of them on the next 2 days. Finally on the morning of 7 April, I flushed one from a perch about 3 m up in a palm tree. The perch proved to be the pitta's nest. I stayed nearby and recorded various notes of the bird but did not get a look at it on the ground.

I notified Bernard Bond and Julian Perry who arrived that evening. At dawn we set a mist net across the bird's flight route from the nest. Later we flushed the bird into the net and collected the nest with its 2 eggs. The bird proved to be the Rusty-naped Pitta *Pitta oatesi*.

Pitta oatesi is a large pitta (total length 25 cm) found in Burma, Thailand and Indochina. The head and underparts are brownish with a black line behind the eye. The mantle to tail is dull greenish, sometimes with a bluish tinge on the rump. The species is currently divided into 3 subspecies (Mayr, *in manuscript*): *P. o. oatesi* (Hume 1873), Burma (including Tenasserim), northwestern Thailand and northern Laos; *P. o. castaneiceps* (Delacour & Jabouille 1930), south Yunnan and Vietnam; *P. o. bolovenensis* (Delacour 1932), Bolovens Plateau of southern Laos. I examined 46 specimens from the collections of the American Museum of Natural History and the United States National Museum: 25 of nominate *oatesi*, 16 of *castaneiceps* and 5 of *bolovenensis*. There is considerable individual variation and some sexual dimorphism which appears not to have been described in the literature. My

sample size precluded attempting this task. However, the sample was adequate to show that while the differences between the three known races are adequate to maintain their status as subspecies, those differences are nevertheless small.

The new pitta is separated from the nearest known population of nominate *oatesi* in Tenasserim (Hume & Davison 1878) by at least 650 km. Since *Pitta oatesi* is found from 900–1,800 m elevation, it is likely that a real gap exists in the narrow central part of the Malay Peninsula (i.e. in southern peninsular Thailand) as there are long distances there where the spinal ridge is below 900 m.

The Malaysian bird is similar in pattern to *Pitta oatesi* and obviously related, but differs from the other 3 races in being much darker overall. The Main Range of Peninsular Malaysia is more perennially humid than the rest of the range of *P. oatesi* and this may account for the greater colour saturation. The Malaysian bird's call is seemingly different from the 'melodius bong-bong' described by Deignan (1945) for *P. o. oatesi* in northwestern Thailand. Playback experiments in Thailand with the Malaysian tapes may provide some clues. For the present the Malaysian bird is best maintained as a race of *Pitta oatesi* and is named as follows:

***Pitta oatesi deborah* subsp. nov.**

Type: Adult male; British Museum (Natural History) No. 1978.1.1. Fraser's Hill, Ulu Tranum Forest Reserve, Main Range, Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia; 3° 43' N, 101° 44' E, elevation approximately 1,200 m; 8 April 1977; collected by Ben King, Bernard Bond and Julian Perry; original number Ben King 2897.

Diagnosis: differs from males of *P. o. oatesi* in its much darker, more rufescent head, nape and sides of neck (dark rufescent brown as opposed to fulvous-brown with a rusty tinge); darker green mantle and upperside of tail (dark grass green, rather than dull green with a coppery tinge, the copper especially strong on the upper wing coverts—some individuals of *oatesi* have a coppery brown mantle with a dull green tinge); more intense, darker, shining blue rump and upper tail coverts (rather than dull green with a slight to strong tinge of paler, sky blue on rump only); lack of black on centre of feathers of mantle (a variable character, often completely missing on *oatesi* and apparently not related to sex); dark green outer webs of secondaries and tertiaries, with a narrow edging of dark buffy brown (rather than dull green with fulvous edging); darker, blacker primaries with narrow fulvous edging on outer web (rather than blackish brown inner web and dark olive-brown outer web); darker, browner underparts with a strong pink suffusion, most feathers broadly tipped pink, grading into the colour of the main part of the feather. The breast of *deborah* is rufescent brown, grading into olive-brown flanks, whitish centre of throat and tawny centre of belly and under tail coverts (males of *oatesi* have fulvous-brown breast and flanks, grading to whitish centre of throat and tawny belly and under tail coverts, the pink tinge faint or absent, and restricted to throat and breast). In common with *P. oatesi*, *deborah* has the dusky loreal patch; black band extending behind eye (about 2.5 cm); lengthened, barbless shafts (up to 7 mm beyond feather tip) of the throat feathers; narrow white area at base of primaries underneath; wing lining consisting of rusty brown lesser

and median coverts, rusty buff inner to buffy white outer greater coverts, and blackish primary coverts.

P. o. bolovenensis differs from nominate *oatesi* in its more rufescent head, greener mantle and stronger blue rump and often upper tail coverts and is thus somewhat closer to *deborah*. However, *deborah* is noticeably darker than *bolovenensis* in all these characteristics. Underparts of *bolovenensis* are like *oatesi*. Male *castaneiceps* differs from *oatesi* in being slightly darker in all aspects, but like *bolovenensis* is closer to *oatesi* than *deborah*.

P. o. deborah appears to be somewhat smaller than the other races of *Pitta oatesi*, with an unflattened wing measurement of 107.5 mm (7 males of *oatesi* ranged from 112.6–122.7 mm, mean 116.3 mm; 9 males of *castaneiceps* ranged from 112.7–119.2 mm, mean 117.4 mm; 2 males of *bolovenensis* measured 114.9 mm and 117.2 mm).

Colour of soft parts: Irides dark brown; bill black, narrowly tipped horn; feet brownish flesh; claws horn.

Measurements: Unflattened wing 107.5 mm; flattened wing 111.4 mm; tail 58 mm; exposed culmen 27 mm; gape 35 mm; tarsus 54 mm; weight 116 g.

The new pitta is named for my close friend Miss Deborah Bodner.

Habitat

The locality is in tropical evergreen forest of the Lower Montane Rain Forest type (Whitmore & Burnham 1969). All three calling pittas were on very steep slopes, where the canopy was 10–20 m high and ground cover moderate to dense.

Nest and Eggs

The nest site was about 3 metres up in the base of a leaf axil of a large palm. The tree was about 40 cm in diameter at nest level and was not identified. The nest was globular, slightly flattened from top to bottom, about 220 mm across by 180 mm high. It was constructed mostly of layers of dead leaves and leaf-skeletons of various broad-leafed trees, plus some palm leaflets, dead fern stems, a few woody rootlets and in the base some sticks up to 5 mm thick. A moderate lining in the lower half of the nest chamber consisted entirely of black plant fibre, possibly from palms, and some fungal hyphae. The nest chamber measured 130 mm front to back and the entrance, which tilted up 20° from the horizontal, 85 mm across by 55 mm from top to bottom.

There were 2 eggs, measuring 29.3 × 25.0 mm and 30.5 × 25.3 mm., the former containing an advanced embryo, the latter addled. They were slightly glossed white with masked purple-brown speckles over the broad end and irregularly shaped chestnut-red speckles fairly dense on the broad end, rather sparse elsewhere. These data compare with 2 possible pitta eggs collected by Allen (1953) from a dead-leaf nest which had collapsed on the ground near the site of the present nest. Those eggs were white, the large end fairly heavily spotted with dark brown and purple; 32 × 24.5 mm and 31 × 25.4 mm.

Habits, field marks and voice

The pittas were extremely shy, never allowing more than a glimpse of a shadow on the ground. The only good views I got in the field were of the

head of one bird while it was incubating eggs, and several good but brief looks as it flew from its nest. They responded readily to playback of their call and moved closer to the call, but remained well hidden while doing so. The netted bird actually responded to taped calls while incubating.

In flight, the blue rump and upper tail coverts are quite conspicuous, contrasting sharply with the green mantle. Once, in a poor glimpse, the only colour I saw was this blue (which may account for reports of blue-backed pittas in this area). In the hand, there is a little white at the base of the underside of the outer primaries, but this was not noticed in the field.

The call-note is a loud melodious *teew-what'* or *chew-whaa'*, the first note inflected downward, the second note higher and more emphatic. The alarm-note heard when I was in the vicinity of the nest was a loud, emphatic, woodpecker-like, metallic *check* or *weck*, sometimes run into a rattle when highly agitated, e.g. just after being flushed from its nest. It also uttered a soft, burry, but somewhat musical *churr*, *chur-r-r-r-rt*, *tur-r-r-r-rt*, or *wer-r-r-r-rt* when I was near the nest and it was nearby on the ground. All the above calls, except the rattle, were taped and are on deposit at the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University.

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Postscript. A statement by W. R. Davison (*Stray Feathers* (1878) 6: 238) casts doubt on the circumstantial attribution of a 'melodious *bong-bong*' call to *Pitta o. oatesi* by Deignan (*Bull. U.S. Natn. Mus.* (1945) 186: 264) in northern Thailand. The same race occurs in Burma where Davison, who collected many specimens of both *P. oatesi* and *P. cyanea*, found its call indistinguishable from that of the latter. King *et al.* (*A Field Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia* (1975): 242) give the call of *P. cyanea* as '*a choo-oo-wit*', the second note drawn out, at first descending and then rising in pitch; the last note sharp'. Apart from the initial syllable this reasonably resembles the advertising call of the newly described *Pitta oatesi deborah*—here independently verbalised as *tyaw-whyek*, the second note briefer, higher-pitched and emphatic. By inference the calls of *P. o. deborah* and *P. o. oatesi* should be at least as similar.

20 February

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I believe Dr. Wells is correct. In February 1978, I taped *Pitta nipalensis* in Assam. Its call is quite like *Pitta oatesi deborah*. Baker ('Fauna of British India', Vol. 3: 447) states of *Pitta oatesi* 'It has the same beautiful loud double whistle' as *Pitta nipalensis*. Thus I believe Deignan either described the call (melodious *bong-bong*) poorly or attributed it to the wrong species. The *bong-bong* could well be *Otus spilocephalus* or an *Arborophila* partridge.

B. K.

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IN BRIEF

First record of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and third record of Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* for South America

On 3 October 1976 I identified an adult Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* amongst a flock of Laughing Gulls *Larus atricilla* on the foreshore at Pointe-a-Pierre on the west coast of Trinidad, and another adult *L. ridibundus* flew in soon afterwards to join the flock. The birds were also seen by R. P. French, D. C. Gilbert and R. A. Harding. These are the first records of *L. ridibundus* for South America (Meyer de Schauensee 1970 and pers. comm.). The species has been recorded in the Caribbean, particularly on Barbados, several times however, so it may occur more regularly in South America and has probably been overlooked.

In the same gull flock on the same day there was also a first-year Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* which was only the second record for Trinidad (see French 1973). The only other certain record of the species off South America is one on the Isla de Aves (15° 42' N, 83° 40' W) (Meyer de Schauensee pers. comm.).

Attention should clearly be paid to gull flocks wherever they occur throughout the world, since unexpected species alien to each area may frequently be missed. Wandering of birds in this family must surely be of widespread occurrence.

21 January 1978

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A hybrid *Hirundo rustica* x *Delichon urbica* in Zambia

On 17 December 1974 I caught a hybrid swallow while ringing hirundines at a roost near Choma in southern Zambia. It shows characters of both the European Swallow *Hirundo rustica* and House Martin *Delichon urbica*, and resembles closely one reported from southern England by Charlwood